

Amendments to the Specification:

Please replace the paragraph beginning on page 8, line 5 with the following amended paragraph:

(Currently Amended) Referring to Figs. 9, 10, and 13, a telescoping shaft assembly 40 incorporating a clearance damping element 50 that is a second embodiment of the present invention is shown. The clearance damping element 50 includes a tube engaging portion 52 and a shaft engaging portion 60. The tube engaging portion 52 includes a body 54 having an open end 56 and having a diameter d_5 configured to interference fit about the tube 108. The shaft engaging portion 60 has a body 62 that is generally an extension of the tube engaging portion body 54, being coplanar on the inner and outer surfaces therewith. A phantom line is provided in Figs. 9 and 10 to distinguish the portions, although they are generally formed of a single cylinder or other desired shape. As in the previous embodiment, a plurality of axial slots 64 extend into the shaft engaging portion body 62 such that a plurality of fingers 66 are defined. A projection 68 extends inwardly at the forward end of each finger 66 to define an area of reduced diameter d_6 ~~[[d_3]].~~ Again, diameter d_6 is less than the outside diameter s_1 of the shaft 109 when the fingers 66 are in a relaxed, unbiased condition, so that when assembled, the fingers 66 and projections 68 are configured to apply a dampening force to the shaft 109 but do not prevent relative axial movement between the shaft 109 and tube 108. In the present embodiment, each of the projections 68 includes a series of splines 70 along an inner edge for engaging with the splined surface of the shaft 109. However, splines are not required on the projection or on the shaft 109.

Please replace the paragraph beginning on page 7, line 3 with the following amended paragraph:

(Currently Amended) Referring to Figs. 7 and 8, assembly of the clearance damping element 10 with the shaft 109 and tube 108 will be described. Referring to Fig. 7, the shaft 109 is extended through the shaft engaging portion 20 and out through the open end 16 of the tube engaging portion 12. As the shaft 109 is extended through the shaft engaging portion 20, the projections 28 contact the larger diameter shaft 109 such that the fingers 26 are flexed outward.

The flexing of the fingers 26 causes a cantilever effect on the fingers 26, causing the fingers 26 and associated projections 28 to exert an inward dampening force upon the shaft 109 that does not prevent relative axial movement between the shaft 109 and tube 108. As shown in Fig. 8, with the clearance damping element 10 in a generally desired position on the shaft 109, the tube 108 is slid over the shaft 109 and into the open end 16 of the tube engaging portion 12. As explained above, the tube engaging portion 12 has an interference fit with respect to the tube 108 or is otherwise secured relative to the tube 108. With the tube engaging portion 12, and thereby the clearance damping element 10, fixed to the tube 108, the inward force of the fingers 26 and projections 28 against the shaft 109, the relative radial movement between the shaft 109 and tube 108 is minimized, reducing the play or lash in the shaft assembly.

Please replace the paragraph beginning on page 6, line 18 with the following amended paragraph:

(Currently Amended) As shown in Figs. 3 and 6, each finger 26 preferably includes an inwardly extending projection 28 adjacent the forward end of the respective finger 26. While all fingers 26 preferably have a projection 28, less than all may be provided with such. The inwardly extending projections 28 provide a reduced diameter d_3 at the forward end of the shaft engaging portion 20, the reduced diameter d_3 being less than the outer diameter s_1 of the shaft 109 when the fingers 26 are in a relaxed, unbiased condition such that the projections 28 engage the shaft 109 as will be described hereinafter. The projections 28 are illustrated as flat pads, but may have other configurations.